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Letter dated 1 October 1999 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Yugoslavia to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly

The statement of Mr. Mate Granic, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Croatia, in the general debate of the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly of the United Nations on 25 September 1999 is a reflection of the duplicity of the policy of the Republic of Croatia towards the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia: a vocal advocate of good-neighbourliness, the Republic of Croatia uses every opportunity to denigrate the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in international forums in an attempt to disguise the true cause of the crisis in the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and to conceal its own responsibility.

1. Oblivious to the secessionism of the former Yugoslav Republics, the Foreign Minister of Croatia trots out the stale accusations that the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia has been the epicentre of the crisis in south-east Europe in the last decade and that the crisis has now escalated to Kosovo and Metohija, the autonomous province of the Yugoslav constituent Republic of Serbia. In raising these accusations, the Foreign Minister of Croatia treats the Serbian province as a separate entity.

2. The Foreign Minister of Croatia falsely accuses the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia of aggression and territorial ambitions towards the Republic of Croatia, even though it is widely known in the international community that the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was ravaged by civil war, caused by the secessionism of some of its Republics, Croatia in particular.

3. The territorial dispute between the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the Republic of Croatia over the Prevlaka peninsula on which bilateral negotiations are under way is being misused in order to interfere in the internal affairs of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The opening of a "border crossing" at one point of the international border of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, termed tendentiously as a border crossing towards Montenegro, is seen as a key contribution of Croatia to the democratic transformation of that Yugoslav Republic. The position of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia on the disputed territorial

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issue of Prevlaka is clear and has been repeatedly stated in official meetings of state delegations of the two countries.

Of particular concern are the indications of the Foreign Minister of Croatia that his country is prepared to change the regime in the region of Prevlaka by unilateral actions. In that context, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia wishes to recall that the Agreement on Normalization of Relations between the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the Republic of Croatia provides for the validity of that regime pending the solution of the disputed issue of Prevlaka. A threat to violate an international obligation unilaterally, including by a military action, is legally untenable and constitutes an open danger fraught with unforeseeable consequences for the relations between the two countries and for peace and security in the region. Such a threat deserves appropriate attention by the Security Council and the United Nations.

4. By confusing the issues and levelling unfounded accusations at others, the Foreign Minister of Croatia embarks upon an elaborate undertaking of concealing the ethnic cleansing of the Serbs from Croatia carried out by his country despite international outrage and censure. That ruse is only too apparent: United Nations Member States are well aware of the assessments of the situation of human rights in Croatia made by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the Council of Europe. At the meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council in Vienna on 3 June 1999 and in the quarterly report of the OSCE mission in Croatia of 18 May 1999, Croatia is censured for failure to carry out its international commitments, in particular vis-à-vis the return of Serbia expellees, amnesty, cooperation with the Hague Tribunal, freedom of the media and the electoral process. The lack of political will on the part of the Government of Croatia to return property to Serbian expellees, to revoke discriminatory laws and to provide material resources for reconstruction has been blamed as a root cause of stagnation in this field.

Resuscitating the old pronouncements about "occupied territories" in Eastern Slavonia, the Foreign Minister of Croatia seeks to justify the ethnic cleansing of the Serbs, in particular Croatian military operations "Flash" and "Storm", launched to achieve that goal, and the flouting of the obligation to ensure the return of the Serbs. Examples of this policy are many and the town of Kistanje may be one of the most conspicuous: prior to August 1999 in was inhabited by Serbs; today no Serb lives in it.

The Foreign Minister of Croatia puts a rosy veneer on Croatia's policy vis-à-vis the return of Serbian expellees and provides a grossly inflated number of Serbs who, he alleges, have returned: the number of 65,000 from Mr. Granic's statement is in sharp contrast to the UNHCR account of only 4,120 Serbs who have in fact returned. Croatia's foot-dragging on the issue is perhaps best illustrated by the fact that, of 24,000 applications submitted by the Serbs from Croatia who have found shelter in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and who are desirous to return to Croatia, Croatia has processed 17,000 requests, granting a positive reply to only 7,000.

Discrimination against the Serbs is evident also in the ongoing amendments of the electoral law on the eve of the forthcoming parliamentary elections. If the bill is to be adopted, the Serbs will have only one member in the Croatian Parliament as against the present 3 or 13 members in the previous Parliament. The political marginalization of the Serbs is calculated to eliminate Serbian representatives from the highest institutions of Croatian government. To add insult to injury, the Foreign Minister of Croatia calls this policy a joint success of Croatia and the United Nations, mocking thus the authority and reputation of the United Nations.

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter circulated as a document of the General Assembly under agenda item 9.

(*Signed*) Vladislav **Jovanovic**
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